

WASHINGTON -- Midlands Republicans on Capitol Hill strongly opposed health care legislation, but most showed little interest this week in repealing it now that it is the law of the land.

One man who is ready for a repeal push is Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa.

"Today the work begins to repeal Obamacare and restore the principles of liberty that made America a great nation," King said within hours of the bill's passage. "The American people must take their country back by methodically eliminating every vestige of creeping socialism, including socialized medicine."

Of course, repeal would be a steep climb. Republicans probably would need to capture the White House, a majority in the House and 60 seats in the Senate, where they currently hold 41.

Sen. Mike Johanns, R-Neb., said that while he believes in the need to start over on health care, repeal is simply not practical.

"It would take a lot of changes in personnel, if you will, in the next election cycle and probably even the next election cycle," Johanns said. As the top Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa was a leading critic during floor debate. But in a press release this week, Grassley touted provisions in the bill that he co-authored to impose standards on the tax exemption of charitable hospitals.

In a telephone conference call with reporters, Grassley continued to take issue with the bill's mandate that individuals obtain health insurance and its cuts in Medicare spending. But he also downplayed the idea of repeal.

"There are some things in the bill that are almost consensus," Grassley said.

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., said he's concerned the new law won't address rising health care costs and simply shift costs to government. But he cited the law's efforts to help those with pre-existing conditions as a "building block" that should be kept.

"It's more like 'repeal and reiplace' or 'repeal and redeem,' because some measure of health care reform needs to take place," Fortenberry said.

Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb., said this week he still believes the law is not good public policy. But he didn't call for repeal and thought the public needed time to digest all the provisions.

"There might be some good parts," he said. "I'm willing to look at some good parts."

Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., said that rather than seeking repeal, Republicans should focus on eliminating "158 new boards, commissions and agencies, emipowering the IRS, mandates, those types of things."

Ending insurance discriminaition based on pre-existing condiitions should be kept, Terry said, but there are ways to make the plan work other than having an individual mandate.

If Republicans win back conitrol of Congress, he said, they can exercise the power of the purse to reduce government inivolvment in health care.

"That's the only way, practicalily, that we're going to be able to make any changes," Terry said.

Contact the writer: 202-662-7270, joe.morton@owh.com

